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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 120906Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3502
INFO RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9722
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1537
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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH REPORTS ON UN DEMOCRACY FUND

REFTEL STATE 019783

¶1. SUMMARY. One project in Bangladesh was awarded under the United Nations Democracy Fund, the "Clean Candidate, Clean Election Campaign, 2006" proposed by Brotee Samaj Kallyan Sangstha. The project is on hold, however, because the elections scheduled for January 22, 2007 in Bangladesh were cancelled on January 11, 2007. No new date for elections has been set yet. No funding has been disbursed. Brotee remains active in other projects, and expects to continue with this program once new election dates are set. END SUMMARY.

UNDEF IN BANGLADESH

¶2. The United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) generated substantial interest in Bangladesh when the first call for proposals went out in 2006. At least six proposals were submitted by Bangladeshi non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and by international NGOs with a significant presence in Bangladesh. One grant was ultimately awarded to a proposal entitled, "Clean Candidate, Clean Election Campaign, 2006 in Bangladesh." This lone recipient was Brotee Samaj Kallyan Sangstha (Brotee), which loosely translates from Bengali as "Commitment to Social Welfare Organization." Due to Bangladesh's turbulent political situation, however, the UN Secretary General in early January 2007 made the decision to delay the release of funds for elections-related technical assistance. The national elections scheduled for January 22, 2007 were suspended indefinitely on January 11, 2007. There is as yet no new date for elections and the project is currently on hold. No funds were disbursed.

BROTEE'S PROPOSAL

¶3. Brotee planned to carry out a series of voter awareness activities to give voters greater access to information both on the electoral process in general and on the candidates in particular. The hope was that increased exposure to public scrutiny would enhance the number of "clean" and "competent" candidates. The period leading up to the January 11 suspension of elections was quite volatile, punctuated by violence and strikes on an almost daily basis. This environment severely restricted most of the country's normal activities including Brotee's proposed campaign.

BROTEE AND UNDEF TODAY

¶4. The local United Nations Development Program (UNDP) office reports it is well informed on both UNDEF and the Brotee project in particular. UNDP is currently in contact with Brotee and the UNDEF to find ways to facilitate this campaign even under the drastically changed circumstances currently present in Bangladesh. Brotee itself appears to have a good working relationship with UNDEF as well. Since the project was postponed before substantial work began, there are no project outputs or outcomes to report on. A new project implementation schedule along with an updated evaluation

plan will be developed once a new election schedule is released and when the UNDEF decides how they plan to move forward under whatever new national election structure is created.

LOOKING FORWARD TO NEW ELECTIONS

¶15. Although the UNDEF sponsored Brotee project never had a chance to get off the ground, their underlying proposal for a campaign towards "clean" candidates remains important and in fact seems far more likely to receive support under the country's current circumstances than if it had been carried out in the environment prevailing before the recently aborted elections. The current general perception is that the newly re-constituted Bangladesh Election Commission, the citizenry in general, and to some extent even the major political parties, are now much more receptive to this type of initiative. Brotee remains engaged with other development partners on elections related issues and is prepared to continue with this proposal once the timing is deemed appropriate.

¶16. Post looks forward to the UNDEF considering funding additional projects in Bangladesh in the future. There is a high level of donor coordination in-country which facilitates greater programmatic impact of programs like future UNDEF supported projects.

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